

# UNTOLD

STORY LEADS FROM MONTANA



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## A Bloodletting in Billings

Here's an opera you can sink your teeth into. "Nosferatu" is just another name for Dracula, and the Rimrock Opera Company is preparing for the world premiere of "Nosferatu," an opera in three acts.

The production is scheduled for the Alberta Bair Theater in Billings October 22 at 8 p.m. and October 24 at 2 p.m.

The opera is based on a silent movie version of the Dracula legend. The libretto was written by Dana Gioia, poet, critic and educator who chairs the National Endowment for the Arts. For this opera, he has created a sinister story. Douglas Nagel, artistic director of the Rimrock Opera Company and a native of Billings, plays Count Orlock, who lives in a desolate, candlelit castle in Hungary. When the sun goes down, he preys on a young man and his wife, getting both his lusty fill of blood and his just reward. It's a dark tale and a timely premiere, coming as it does just a week before Halloween.

Since its founding in 1997, Rimrock Opera Company has staged eight operas in Billings. ROC now has a solid following and plays an important role in the Billings cultural community. The company plans a reception after Friday evening's performance



*The Count is in the mood for a little bite.*

October 22 with the composer, librettist and all the principal players, and a Saturday brunch October 23 at which the public can meet the composer and have a libretto signed by Gioia. The brunch is scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Petroleum Club, on the tenth floor of the Sheraton Hotel, 1st Ave. and N. 27th St.

Count Orlock will lend his presence at a blood drive at the city's Rimrock Mall August 27 and 28. He knows a lot about collecting blood, but really, folks, he doesn't bite.

For more information, visit [www.rimrockopera.org](http://www.rimrockopera.org).

## Make Plans Now to "Explore the Big Sky"

Tickets are now on sale for the 2005 bicentennial celebration of the 1805 passage of Lewis and Clark through the Upper Missouri River. "Explore the Big Sky" will last longer than a month, June 1-July 4, and include a grand opening gala along the Missouri in Fort Benton, a ballet and opera, historical reenactments, academic symposiums, lacrosse games, canoe races, tribal games, a traditional and contemporary Indian arts and crafts market, museum exhibits, a Plains Indian encampment, parades and fireworks...need we go on? Tickets are now on sale at the Great Falls Civic Center box office, 406 455-8514. Writers, photographers, and editors who are interested in covering any festival events should make plans now. Contact Ric Bourie at 406 841-2893 or [ric@visitmt.com](mailto:ric@visitmt.com).

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Ghost Writer in the Big Sky

Raptor Rapture Runs Deep

Migration in Missoula

Seed Art

Fort Assiniboine at 125



# Ghost Writer in the Big Sky

**She's an interpretive historian at the Montana Historical Society, but she also studies ghosts, dead legends, and things that go bump in the night.**

Ellen Baumlér was conducting research for a sign at an historic house in Virginia City when she heard a legend about a ghostly, bloody apparition that appeared in the bathtub of the house. Like any good historian, she followed this lead and uncovered a news article about the suicide of a lonely widow who lived in the house until 1923, when she bought a revolver in Butte, brought it home, placed the muzzle in her mouth and pulled the trigger. Where did authorities find her? In the bathroom. Baumlér's interest in ghost stories increased and evolved.

"I'd heard a lot of these stories," Baumlér says. "People tell all these stories but they don't look for historical reasons why these stories get started. I get frustrated reading ghost stories. No one bothers to go back and

research the legends." Baumlér's research resulted in the 2002 publication of her first book *Spirit Tailings: Ghost Tales from Virginia City, Butte, and Helena*. The suicide of Amanda McKeen became chapter two, "The Body in the Bathtub."

Baumler has a sequel coming to bookshelves next spring, *Beyond Spirit Tailings*. It will include ghost stories from Hamilton, Helena, Butte, and Havre; the legend of the Flathead Lake monster; and the story of a 1944 plane crash in Billings.

Her keen interest in ghost stories, she says, has offered a way to make local history



Ellen Baumlér

appeal to young people. "It draws kids into solid Montana history," she says. "My colleagues criticize me, I'm sure, but I think it's great for kids. It's really community history at its best."

In Uptown Butte, a self-guided walking tour leads the visitor to the old Dumas Hotel, which operated as a brothel from 1890 until 1982 and gave us the story of Elinor Knott. She ran the brothel in the early 1950s and in 1955 was found dead in the madam's apartment. She was packed and ready to leave the hotel and Butte with her lover, who promised her he would come to meet her and they would drive off to find a new life together. The coroner ruled the death due to natural causes, but those who knew her said Knott died of an overdose of alcohol and sleeping pills. As *Spirit Tailings* tells it, one of the apparitions at the Dumas walks the halls and stairways carrying a suitcase.

Other buildings reputed to be haunted in Butte include the Butte-Silver Bow Courthouse, the Arts Chateau, and the Copper King Mansion.

Ellen Baumlér's *Spirit Tailings* is available from Montana Historical Society Press, P.O. Box 201201, Helena, MT 59620-1201 or at [montanahistoricalsociety.org](http://montanahistoricalsociety.org). Click on "museum store" and "online shopping."

## Raptor Rapture Runs Deep

Call it a golden opportunity. Fall is migration time for the world's avian species and Bridger Mountain in Bozeman attracts the largest number of migrating golden eagles in North America. This year's Bridger Raptor Festival is scheduled for October 2-3. The festival is based at Jim Bridger Lodge, at the foot of Bridger Bowl. Birding enthusiasts will gather that weekend to watch golden eagles and 16 other species of raptors soar above the peaks and ridges of the Bridger Range. Naturalists will help participants identify the birds. Programs for children will be offered and owls and hawks from the Montana Raptor Center will be on hand.

Birding is a fast-growing tourist activity in Montana. Establishment of a birding trail is well underway in the



A golden eagle.

Bitterroot Valley, with another trail being planned in Missouri River Country. An economic report issued last year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that 66 million Americans spent more than \$38 billion in observing, feeding or photographing wildlife. For every \$1 expended for those

activities, the report claimed that wildlife watchers spend another \$1.49 on lodging, meals and transportation. That's a healthy lot of economic activity and the establishment of birding trails and other tourism infrastructure tied in to wildlife watching provides a low-impact and sustainable way to welcome visitors.

A golden opportunity indeed!

The Bozeman Convention and Visitors Bureau is hosting a press trip centered on the festival. If you're interested in joining the trip, contact Cyndy Andrus at 406 586-5421 or [candrus@bozemanchamber.com](mailto:candrus@bozemanchamber.com).





*New home of the Montana Natural History Center*

## Migration in Missoula

**Autumn is a time for migration and the Montana Natural History Center in Missoula is on the move this season to more spacious quarters in a more accessible place. The center is moving from its current home in the old post headquarters at Fort Missoula, on the southwest edge of town, to a post and beam building vacated by Big Sky Brewing in the heart of Missoula.**

The Natural History Center will be moving into the vacated building on Hickory Street, a stone's throw from the south bank of the Clark Fork River and from a new recreational complex that includes a new baseball park, the home of the Missoula Osprey, and a planned aquatic center.

The Fort Missoula building is 1,800 square feet in area. In the Hickory Street building, the MNHC will have 10,000 square feet of space just on the main floor. The building was bought last May for \$560,000. Renovations began in August and the museum hopes to open its doors by November, but as Executive Director Brad Robinson points out, "When you buy a fixer-upper, getting into it is just the beginning." Robinson estimates the renovations will cost somewhere between \$300,000 and \$350,000.

"We're not building the massive exhibits

we anticipate having right away," Robinson says. Instead, the museum will take advantage of its access to thousands of specimens from the Phillip Wright Zoological Museum, part of the Division of Biological Sciences at the University of Montana. The zoological museum collection includes life-sized mounts of grizzly, black bear, bison, sandhill crane and numerous other wildlife species. The MNHC acts as the public outreach arm of the zoological museum, which has scant space for exhibiting its vast holdings. These specimens will be used in "old-style" displays in the new building. Newer, interactive exhibits will come later, including a model of Glacial Lake Missoula that museum officials hope will use hydraulics to show the massive force of the water that burst from the lake and sculpted landforms in eastern Washington. "We don't know how we're going to pull that off, but we have space dedicated for it," Robinson says.

He adds that the center has a 10-year, \$4 million plan for development of the new space. One major theme will be "fire and ice," showing the ways that wildfires and glaciers have shaped the land and life of Montana. The center would also like to show, through programs as well as its architecture, the historic use of large-diameter timber and the more contemporary building techniques that use small-diameter timber. For this goal, the center hopes to work closely in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service and the wood products industry.

**For more information on the Montana Natural History Center, visit [www.thenaturecenter.org](http://www.thenaturecenter.org).**

## Seed Art: from the Garden to the Gallery

From small seeds, mighty works of art grow. Residents of Richland County, in northeastern Montana, spend countless evenings with seeds of many shapes and colors and bottles of Elmer's Glue. They work together in teams to create murals that are judged every summer at the Richland County Fair. It's meticulous work, the competition is fierce, and the subject of each "picture" is a closely guarded secret.

The pictures, some of which get very large, portray an agricultural theme. Though the works are known as seed art, the only limit to materials is that they must be native-grown products. They also must be used in their natural color, not painted or dyed.

Pictures from past years have included Porky Pig riding a tractor. At the 2002 fair, in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, every entry included the stars and stripes. The artists have used rape seed, nowadays better known as canola. The seeds are about the size of a pinhead and, to make an outline, need to be glued one at a time. They've used dried flowers. They've ground up the petals. They've glued beans, corn, pine cones, pine needles, spearmint leaves, lilac leaves and Russian olive. Fresh sheared wool can be used for clouds. Last year, a panel 7.5 feet by 10 feet showed a man on a red tractor. Dried butterflies, fully intact, were glued on the panel. "They looked like they were alive," recalls Missy Norby of Lambert, a county fair secretary.

**For more information about seed art contact Ric Bourie at 406 841-2893 or [ric@visitmt.com](mailto:ric@visitmt.com).**



*Ruth Iversen of Sidney is on border patrol, glueing red beans on the picture.*

## Fort Assinniboine at 125

It's 125 years old this year and still standing. For that it gets a lot of help. At Fort Assinniboine, outside Havre, 15 of the original 104 brick buildings are still upright. The fort was built at the end of the Indian Wars to establish a military presence in the territory. It was one of the nation's largest military posts. The fort plays an important role in the history of north central Montana.

The 18th U.S. Infantry made the bricks and built the fort to withstand the elements. The troops were in constant skirmishes with the Sioux and the Cree. General John J. Pershing, famous for his WWI command, served at Assinniboine. The African American 10th Cavalry, the Buffalo Soldiers, were stationed there in 1892, six years before they gained fame for their role in the Spanish-American War. By 1911, the War Department had abandoned the post.

The Fort Assinniboine Preservation Association is a non-profit group that conducts tours of the fort and works to stabilize the remaining historic buildings. Tours, leaving from the H. Earl Clack Museum in Havre, are offered at 5 p.m. every day from June 1 to Sept. 1. If you've missed that season, tours will also be offered during an open house from 1-5 p.m. September 19 during Havre Festival Days. Festival Days will celebrate the 125th anniversary of the fort. All proceeds from tours go to the building improvement funds.



Photo Courtesy Havre Daily News

*African American soldiers were stationed at Fort Assiniboine in 1892.*

### Autumn Highlights in Big Sky Country

#### October

**2 McIntosh Apple Day, Ravalli County Museum, Hamilton**

Apple butter bubbling over an open fire, apple juice being squeezed, a giant Farmers Market with arts and crafts, live music all day and lots of specialty food items.  
<http://www.cybernet1.com/rcmuseum>

**9 Old Faithful Fall Cycle Tour, West Yellowstone**

Begins at the West Yellowstone Visitor Information Center. Ride 60 miles to Old Faithful and back, or shuttle and ride as much as you want. <http://www.wyyellowstone.com/fallcycletour>

**23-24 Bannack Ghost Walks, Bannack State Park**

Bannack's wild past comes alive at Ghost Walks. Reservations required, \$6 per person.  
<http://www.bannack.org>

**29 Fort Benton Murder Mystery**

Enjoy a stay in an exquisitely restored guest room at the Grand Union and a sumptuous five-course meal in the riverside Union Grille Restaurant. Dig into an old trunk for fantastic costumes and props and figure out whodunit. <http://www.grandunionhotel.com>

**For a complete listing of Montana events, log onto <http://www.visitmt.com/tripplanner/events/>**

### FROM MONTANA

The diversity of events, places and people in Montana is almost as wide as the state itself. We hope to give you a taste of that diversity with this quarterly newsletter. In addition, the following services are offered to editors, writers and producers:

#### Visual Materials

Color slides and stock video footage are available for editorial use.

#### Writer/Photographer Referrals

We can put you in contact with many of Montana's most talented and experienced freelance writers and photographers.

#### Editorial Copy/Calendar of Events

We can provide background information or editorial copy for many subjects. We also maintain a calendar of events for the entire state.

#### Individual Attention

If you need the latest vacation guide and road map of Montana, a liaison with other government agencies or detailed information to fit a specific story angle, we're here to assist you.

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